

# Exploring on the rocky seashore

WHEN YOU PICK your way along a rocky shore you will probably have your head down, watching where you put your feet. You may see very few living things except some battered-looking shrubs and some gulls screaming their silly heads off.

By David Gregorie

HOW DULL, you think, nothing much lives here. Look more closely: from the tops of the cliffs to as deep as you could dive there are dozens of different kinds of plants and hundreds of different kinds of animals.

Even the sea is a sort of living soup; if you scoop up a jar of sea water and hold it up to the light, you will see hundreds of tiny living things moving around. These are plankton. They are not just one kind of animal, but hundreds of different kinds of tiny animals and hundreds more of baby animals that will one day grow much bigger, unless they get eaten of course!

They are the beginning of the great "food chain" of the ocean. Lots of creatures feed on them directly, from the pipi hiding under the sand and sucking cold plankton soup in through its siphon tube to the tens of thousands of small fish swimming through the clouds

of plankton and snapping it up as they go.

Bigger fish eat the little fish, and large fish eat the bigger fish; all of them, right up to the sharks and the swordfish, depend on the plankton. If some dreadful pollution killed all the plankton in the sea, you would never again have fish and chips! Well, you could have the chips.

## Four layers

Life along a rocky seashore is something like a club sandwich, each layer containing something different. We call the layers "zones" and there are four of them, from the tops of the coastal cliffs to the cold, dark deep of the ocean.

We call the top layer the **shore zone**. This is anywhere along the coast where the sea breezes blow, but out of the reach of the waves and spray. This is where the sea birds have their nests, where the hardy shore plants grow, and where hundreds of insects, spiders, lizards, and other creatures scuttle and hide.

The next layer we call the **splash zone**. This is a tough place to live. It is above the high-tide zone, but often gets

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